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ABSTRACT

State advisory panels for special education are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Panels are composed of individuals with disabilities, their parents, special education teachers and administrators, and local and state education officials. A random national sample of 200 of the 965 members of IDEA state advisory panels was mailed a 46-item survey questionnaire covering demographics, panel agendas and goals, and members' satisfaction and perceptions of their panel's effectiveness. After three follow-ups, responses were received from 175 panel members for a total response rate of 88 percent. The typical panel member was White, female, and 46 years of age; resided in an urban setting; worked in the field of education; and had a master's degree. Panel size ranged from 7 to 50 members with a mean of 20. The members' perception of panel compliance with legislative and regulatory mandates was the factor that best predicted members' perception of panel effectiveness. Perceived panel effectiveness was also related to members' satisfaction with their roles on the panel and to members' perception that panel functions were fulfilled. Recommendations for state directors of special education are included. Contains 29 references. (SV)

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INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION (IDEA) STATE ADVISORY PANELS: FACTORS OF PERCEIVED PANEL EFFECTIVENESS

The study of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) State Advisory Panels' perceived effectiveness employed survey research utilizing a stratified, random sample for the purpose of determining the factors that predicted panel members' perceived view of IDEA State Advisory Panels as effective. The research incorporated the nonmanipulated, independent factors of: (a) perceived compliance with legislative and regulatory mandates (PC), (b) perceived panel functions (PF), (c) perceived personal knowledge of special education law and regulations (PK), (d) perceived participant satisfaction (PS), and (e) perceived degree of mutual benefit derived from service on the panel (MB). Personal and panel demographics were investigated for possible correlations with perceived panel effectiveness. The personal information requested of each respondent was: (a) age, (b) gender, (c) ethnicity, (d) current occupation, and (e) highest educational level attained. The panel demographic data requested included: (a) number of panel members; (b) rural, urban or metropolitan residency of the respondent; (c) distances traveled in order to attend state panel meetings; (d) years of membership on the state panel; (e) offices held on the panel, if any; and (f) category of membership (group represented).

The study applied a research design involving qualitative methodology and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative methodology was used for the creation of the survey instrument while quantitative research principles guided the data collection and analysis of the survey. The study utilized qualitative research methodology of in-depth phenomenological interviews (Seidman, 1991), key informant interviews, participant observation, and document review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The qualitative research methodology identified the following emerging themes: (a) proactive, reactive, or inactive panel, (b) leadership of the panel, (c) travel to attend panel meeting, (d) number and scheduling of meetings, (e) agendas, (f) purposes or goals for the panel, (g) satisfaction of the members, (h) membership, (i) mutual benefit from serving on the panel, and (j) effectiveness of the panel. The themes were combined with an extensive literature review to identify the five factors which might be predictive of IDEA state advisory panel member's perception of the panel as effective.

Following a review of Tests in Print III (Mitchell, 1983), it was determined that a valid instrument for the study did not exist. A survey instrument consisting of 34 content and 12 demographic questions prepared on a 4 point Likert-type scale was developed. The 34 content items were designed so that they: (a) followed a natural, random sequence; (b) were of reasonable length; (c) were clearly understandable; and (d) were eliciting objective responses (Miller, 1991). The questions were: (a) written in a straight forward, unambiguous manner; (b) carefully ordered, and (c) presented in a visually attractive manner (Dilman, Christensen, Carpenter, & Brooks, 1974; Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983; Sudman & Bradburn, 1983). The third page of the questionnaire contained the demographic information.

The questionnaire was pilot tested in New Mexico on past members of New

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Mexico's IDEA Advisory Panel (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983). These past members included IDEA panel State Director of Special Educations, administrators of special education programs, college professors, special education teachers, an individual with a disability, and a parent of an individual with a disability. The questionnaire was piloted to determine: (a) validity of the instrument, (b) clarity of presentation, (c) reliability of the instrument, (d) avoidance of biased questions, and (c) ease of administration. The results of the pilot testing were analyzed. Based upon the feedback from the individuals, revisions were made in the sequencing of the questions, the presentations of the questions, and the content of some of the questions. The feedback from the pilot testing verified the clarity of the content, the ease of administration, and the validity and reliability of the content (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson). A panel of experts reviewed the revised instrument. The panel of experts consisted of five professors, three in special education, one in general education, and one in survey research, from New Mexico State University.

The final questionnaire was prepared in agreement with the research of Dilman, Christensen, Carpenter, and Brooks (1974); Miller (1991); Orlich (1978); Rossi, Wright, and Anderson (1983); Sudman and Bradburn (1983); and Weisberg & Bowen (1977). The previous reviews conducted by the jury of experts as well as the results of the pilot testing aided in the preparation of the final questionnaire. To avoid a potential problem with response set, the sequence of questions were ordered so that 50% of the desired answers entailed a negative response (Weisberg & Bowen). The finalized questionnaire was printed on 11" x 17" 20 pound yellow paper. The questionnaire was folded into a 4 page, single fold, 8 1/2" x 11" booklet with the directions and items printed in black ink (Dilman et al.; Miller; Sudman & Bradburn). The return address was printed on the last page of the booklet to assist in a quick response rate (Sudman & Bradburn).

In 1990, Congress passed P.L. 101-476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). One of the components of IDEA was the continuation of state advisory panels. According to the federal regulations for the implementation of IDEA, the panel membership is to include one person from each of the following groups: (a) individuals with disabilities, (b) teachers of individuals with disabilities, (c) parents of individuals with disabilities, (d) state and local educational officials, and (e) administrators of special education programs [34 CFR §300.651] (Aleman, 1991). The target population for the survey research was the 50 State IDEA Advisory Panels and the District of Columbia. The Special Education Director for each state provided a listing of the state's IDEA Advisory Panel Members. The lists were divided into subpopulations or stratas according to the membership representation mandated by IDEA: (a) individuals with disabilities, (b) teachers of individuals with disabilities, (c) family members of individuals with disabilities, (d) state and local education officials, (e) administrators of programs for individuals with disabilities, and (f) other members. The other member strata included: writers, housewives, nurses, librarians, social workers, medical personnel, psychologists, counselors, parent teacher association presidents, political analysis, and retired individuals. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the proportional representation of each membership category for the total population of state advisory panel members in 1996.

From the individual stratas, a random sample was selected in agreement with the proportional representation of the total population (Weisberg & Bowen, 1977). The random sample was selected using a Rand Table of Random Numbers (Rossi, Wright & Anderson, 1983; Sudman, 1976). This was not a census but a stratified, random sampling with an $\underline{N}$ = 200 from a total population of 965. Table 1 provides the breakdown of the proportional representation of each membership category for the

stratified sample. The proportional representation of each membership category for the total population and the stratified sample were identical.

Table 1
Membership Representation

Membership Category	Total Population Membership Population	%	Sample Population Membership Population	%
Indiv/Dis	73	07.5	15	07.5
Family Members	179	18.5	37	18.5
Teachers	173	17.9	36	17.9
Officials	179	18.5	37	18.5
Administrators	161	16.6	33	16.6
Others	200	20.7	42	20.7
Totals	965	99.7	200	99.7

On March 25, 1996, the initial survey and transmittal memorandum were mailed to each individual in the random, stratified sample of 200 IDEA advisory panel members. The transmittal memorandums were prepared on New Mexico State University letterhead (Dilman, Christensen, Carpenter, & Brooks, 1974; Response Analysis, 1981). Each memorandum was prepared for a specific mailing. They all contained deadline dates (Warwick & Lininger, 1975) and stressed the social usefulness of the study (Dilman et al.). In addition, the importance of each respondent to the success of the study was stressed (Dilman et al.) The initial mailing consisted of: (a) survey questionnaire, (b) transmittal memorandum on New Mexico State University letterhead, (c) support letter from the Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and (d) a dollar bill (Response Analysis, 1981) placed in a 9" x 12" envelope. The survey was printed on 11" x 17" yellow 20 pound paper folded into a four-page booklet (Miller, 1991; Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Each survey carried a handwritten code which included an identification number (Sudman & Bradburn), the state, and the membership category of the individual. In an attempt to encourage a timely response the following three measures were taken.

1. The questionnaire was pre-stamped and addressed (Warwick & Lininger, 1975). Upon completion of the questionnaire, the respondents were only required to fold it, staple it, and drop it in a mailbox.
2. The initial mailing included a monetary token of appreciation in the form of a dollar bill (Response Analysis, 1981).
3. A drawing was held from the respondents returning their questionnaires by April 8, 1996 for a monetary prize of $100.00 (Fletcher, 1990).

On April 25, 1996, 87 nonrespondents to the initial mailing were sent the first follow-up memorandum and a self-addressed, stamped survey questionnaire on yellow paper (Heberlein & Baumgartner, 1978; Sewell & Shaw, 1978). On May 25, 1996, 46 nonrespondents were sent a second follow-up memorandum and a self-addressed, stamped survey questionnaire on blue paper. On June 28, 1996, a telephone call was placed to the remaining 31 nonvolunteering respondents by the researcher. During the telephone conversation, the status of the survey was determined. Twenty five individuals (12% of the total sample) stated that they were not going to complete the survey; while 7 individuals (3.5% of the total sample) agreed to answer the survey over the phone.

As noted on Table 2, following the initial mailing of 200 surveys, 113 were returned for an initial response rate of 57%. After the first follow-up memorandum, an additional 41 surveys were returned for a total response rate of 77%. The second follow-up letter netted 14 surveys for an overall response rate of 84%. The telephone contact resulted in 7 additional surveys for an overall final response rate of 88%.

Table 2
Rate of Response by Mailings

Mailing	Total # Mailed	Total # Returned	% Returned on Each Contact	Total % Returned	Total # Returned
INITIAL MAILING					
Individual	15	10	67		
Family	37	17	46		
Teacher	36	23	64		
Official	37	19	51		
Administrator	33	23	70		
Other	42	21	50		
TOTALS	200	113	57	57	
FIRST FOLLOW UP					
Individual	5	2	40		
Family	20	9	45		
Teacher	13	5	38		
Official	18	10	56		
Administrator	10	8	80		
Other	21	7	33		
TOTALS	87	41	47	77	
SECOND FOLLOW UP					
Individual	3	1	33		
Family	11	5	45		
Teacher	8	2	25		
Official	8	0	00		
Administrator	2	0	00		
Other	14	6	43		
TOTALS	46	14	30	84	
TELEPHONE FOLLOW UP					
Individual	2	1	50	93	14
Family	5	1	20	86	32
Teacher	6	1	17	86	31
Official	8	0	00	78	29
Administrator	2	1	50	97	32
Other	8	3	38	86	37
TOTALS	31	7	23	88	175

In the study the nonmanipulated, predictive variables of: (a) perceived panel compliance with legislative and regulatory panel mandates (PC), (b) perceived panel fulfillment of organizational functions (PF), (c) perceived personal knowledge of special education law and regulations (PK), (d) perceived participant satisfaction (PS), and (e) perceived mutual benefit (MB) were correlated with the dependent variable, perceived panel effectiveness. The following hypothesis was developed for the study.

> For the population of state IDEA Advisory Panel members, perceived panel's compliance with legislative and regulatory mandates (PC), perceived fulfillment of panel functions (PF), perceived member's

personal knowledge of special education law and regulations (PK), perceived panel participant's satisfaction (PS), and perceived panel member's mutual benefit (MB) are predictive of the IDEA panel members' perceptions of panel effectiveness (PE).

The study employed survey research to accept or fail to accept the research hypothesis. The study attempted to minimize the threat of confounding variables that could influence the survey results by: (a) employing random selection, (b) stratifying results by levels of environmental or personological variables, and (c) collecting information with a neutral and unbiased questionnaire (Gay, 1987; Moore, 1983). Individual item omission was noted in the computer data. When more than 50% of the items were omitted the survey was removed from the data base. Two surveys (1% of the total sample) were missing more than 50% of the data. The data analysis utilized percentage analysis of the responses for the content and demographic questions, Pearson Product Correlation, Analysis of Variance, Fisher Exact and multiple linear regression. The responses of the nonvolunteering individuals were analyzed separately from the volunteered responses. There were no statistical differences in the responses of seven nonvolunteering respondents when compared to the total sample population.

Based upon the results of the study, the predictive models for perceived panel effectiveness are:

1 variable model: Perceived Panel Compliance
2 variable model: Perceived Panel Compliance, Perceived Participant Satisfaction
3 variable model: Perceived Panel Compliance, Perceived Participant Satisfaction, and Perceived Panel Functions

The members' perception of panel compliance of legislative and regulatory mandates is the most predictive factor of perceived panel effectiveness. Perceived participant satisfaction (i.e., the member's perceived view of their satisfaction as a panel member) when combined with perceived panel compliance is the best two variable predictive model. The final predictive model of perceived panel effectiveness is the combination of perceived panel compliance, perceived participant satisfaction, and perceived fulfillment of panel functions (i.e., utilization of agendas, scheduling of meetings, mailing of minutes, participating members, and completing tasks).

The demographic results indicate the typical IDEA state advisory panel member is white, female, and 46 years of age. She resides in an urban setting, works in the field of education, and has a masters degree. She has served on the panel for three years. The typical panel has 20 members who travel an average of 161 miles to attend the meetings. For a typical panel of 20 members, there would be 1 individual with disabilities (8%), 4 family members of individuals with disabilities (18%), 3 teachers of individuals with disabilities (17%), 4 state and local education officials (18%), 3 administrators of programs for individuals with disabilities (17%), and 5 other members (21%).

Based upon the results of the study panel compliance (PC) is predictive of perceived panel effectiveness. This results supports the works of Brawer (1980), Brown (1982), Duganne-Glicksman and Dutton (1988), and Parry-Hill (1981). For the respondents of the survey, panel compliance is the most significant variable in their perception of the panel as effective. If the panel is perceived as fulfilling the legal and legislative mandates, then the panel will be perceived as effective.

The findings of the study support the research of Bedelan (1984), Caple and Cox (1989), Dimock (1987), Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnely (1979), and Napier and Gershenfeld (1981) in the area of participant satisfaction. Perceived participant satisfaction (PS) is the next variable of significance in the respondents' perception of panel effectiveness. The recommendation for State Director of Special Education, based upon the study results, is to guide the panel so that the members are satisfied in their roles as members. If members are satisfied in their work on the panel, then they will perceive the panel as effective.

The final significant variable is perceived panel functions (PF). The findings of the study substantiate the research of Beckwith (1981), Gallon and Wattenbarger (1976), and Parry-Hill (1981) in the area of panel functions as indicators of panel effectiveness. Based upon the results of the study, the recommendation for State Director of Special Education is to be conscientious in: (a) involving all members, (b) encouraging attendance, (c) motivating completion of assigned tasks, (d) organizing distribution of minutes, (e) assigning regular meeting times, and (f) utilizing agendas at meetings. The fulfillment of these functions lead members to view the panel as effective.

The demographic results indicate a range of panel members from 7 to 50 with a mean of 20. The size of the panel is statistically significant (0.0421) to the perception of the panel as effective based upon the analysis of variance at an alpha level of 0.05. The research of Dimock (1987) and Kemp (1964) indicates that smaller panels are more effective. In contrast, IDEA study indicates that size is correlated to perceived panel effectiveness, but the panels were larger than the committees sited in Dimock and Kemp's research. In the study the level of educational attainment is statistically significant (0.04 at an alpha of 0.05) to the perception of panel effectiveness. According to the survey results, 161 respondents have more than 13 years of education, with 12 respondents having less than 13 years of education, and the mean educational level is a master degree. The study appears to support the research of Curtis, Grabb, and Baer (1992) which indicates that individuals with 13 years of more of education have a higher membership rate than individuals with less than 13 years of education.

In summary, the study of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) State Advisory Panels employed survey research utilizing a stratified, random sample of 200 panel members for the purpose of determining the factors that predicted of the member's perception of panel effectiveness. The research incorporated the nonmanipulated, independent variables of perceived compliance with legislative and regulatory mandates, perceived panel functions, perceived personal knowledge of special education law and regulations, perceived participant satisfaction, and perceived degree of mutual benefit derived from service on the panel. The results indicate that perceived panel compliance is the most predictive model of perceived panel effectiveness. Perceived participant satisfaction and perceived panel functions also indicate significant correlation with perceived panel effectiveness. The recommendations for State Director of Special Education based upon the study results include: (a) providing members with the knowledge of how the panel is in compliance with legislative and regulatory mandates, (b) providing a free and understanding environment in which the members can accomplish their duties, thus increasing participant satisfaction, (c) providing for the smooth functioning of the panel in completing its responsibilities, (d) providing membership recruitment without an overwhelming concern to limit the size of the panel to seven to ten members, and (e) providing membership recruitment of individuals with an awareness of the individuals level of educational attainment.

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